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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 000268

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/RSA, AND AF/E

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SUBJECT: AU SUMMIT -- AF ACTING A/S CARTER MEETS WITH
SOMALI PRESIDENT SHEIKH SHARIF

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: AF Acting Assistant Secretary Phillip Carter, joined by U.S. Special Envoy for Somalia John Yates, met February 2 with newly elected Somali President Sheikh Sharif on the margins of the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa. Carter said the USG would like to see Sharif appoint a broad-based and inclusive cabinet, travel to and remain in Mogadishu to establish credibility, support our plans to develop an accountable and transparent mechanism to pay joint security forces, and support the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeepers. Sharif was generally very amenable but expressed skepticism that he would be able to draw in those who were opposed to the concept of the Djibouti peace process. Carter also encouraged and offered to help Sharif develop a public relations strategy to counter Al Shabaab disinformation.
End Summary.

¶2. (C) Sharif said he appreciates the help of the United States with the Djibouti peace process and the support of U.S. Special Envoy for Somalia Yates. He said he faces many challenges, including continuing the peace process, establishing a joint security force, improving the humanitarian situation, and forming a unity government. He asked for USG political and moral support and would like to strengthen the relationship.

¶3. (C) Carter said the United States and Somalia share the same objectives. Carter noted four things Sharif needs to be thinking about right away. First, the selection of a prime minister and formation of the cabinet should be as broad-based and inclusive as possible. There are many groups who want this process to fail, and Sharif must not give them the opportunity to argue that the government is not inclusive. The more inclusive the cabinet is, the better the chances of success. Second, the various groups within Somalia have to see this government as their own. Sharif cannot allow rival, parallel institutions to implant themselves. For this reason, Carter said Sharif needs to establish himself and his cabinet in Mogadishu right away and avoid international travel, at least for the first couple of months. Traveling abroad will diminish the President's credibility in the eyes of many Somalis. Also, since it is difficult for the international community to operate inside Somalia, it relies on the President and his government to keep us informed about what is happening on the ground.

¶4. (C) Third, Carter said, the USG supports Sharif's formation of a joint security force, and is working to develop a mechanism so payment of the troops is accountable and transparent. Carter excused himself for being blunt, but said that there have been instances in the past where the international community has disbursed funds intended for paying security forces, but those funds have ended up in the pockets of

senior government officials. Fourth and last, the USG is counting on Sharif to support AMISOM, and to publicly tell his people that AMISOM's purpose is to support the Somali peace process. AMISOM troops are not conquerors or invaders; they are fellow Africans there to help the Somali people.

15. (C) Sheikh Sharif said he wanted to make the point that he and his allies are not corrupt. He said he would like USG help to strengthen the joint security forces and find it amusing that previous governments had siphoned off funds intended for security forces. He would like to work together with AMISOM: prior to his election he often said publicly AMISOM is here to help. Regarding inclusivity, this will not be easy, but he will extend his hand and see what happens.

16. (C) Carter said he encourages Sheikh Sharif to extend his hand and grab hands, pulling those who are less than willing but peaceful and constructive into his cabinet. The President should work to improve the unity government's messaging and public relations. Until now, the high ground has been held by Al Shabaab. He admitted that it has been a challenge for the United States, and many Somalis have gotten a false notion of what the United States is trying to do in Somali as a result of Al Shabaab's disinformation campaign. They are spreading nonsense that Americans dislike Islam. The USG does have direct security concerns. The recruitment of young Somali American citizens to jihad is of particular concern which the USG cannot and will not accept. Whatever actions the USG takes, Carter said, Sharif should know that the USG will continue to be focused on a select, tiny group of extremists who have carried out horrible crimes.

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17. (C) Sharif said there is lots of propaganda, and thinks he knows better how to get a handle on it. Somalis are not hostile to Americans in spite of Al Shabaab's efforts. It would be productive if the USG could directly state the message as often as possible that you are not against Islam. Yates said Al Shabaab's disinformation campaign is affecting the international community's ability to deliver humanitarian assistance and a number of aid workers have been killed as a result. Carter noted that 80 percent of food aid comes from American farmers. He said: "The hard work starts today. We will work with you."

18. (C) Sharif concluded by stating that he wants to establish good relations with his neighbors. Carter said Somalia's neighbors want this too, and now they have someone they can talk to.

19. (U) Acting A/S Carter approved this message before departing Addis.
YAMAMOTO